

INTRODUCTION

Story: elegant British lady and her cookies (sharing)

Today we are studying perhaps the most famous *sharing* story in the Bible—the feeding of the 5000. A lesser known saint (an anonymous little boy) shared his lunch with the disciples who in turn gave it to Jesus. And then Jesus—well, you know. The rest is history—gospel history.

I can think of several OT stories about sharing and divine provision that seem to foreshadow this gospel narrative. Can you recall such stories?

One features the prophet **Elijah** and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8ff.)...

A bigger background picture is that of **Moses** and the Israelites eating manna in the wilderness.

In the NT we have a record of many signs and wonders from the ministry of Jesus. These miracle stories are scattered throughout the four gospels—some in one gospel and some in another. Of course, all four gospels include the central events of Jesus’ ministry: Palm Sunday and Good Friday; his death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. And all four record one, particular **miracle story**...the **feeding of the 5000**.

We read the Markan account a moment ago; now hear **John 6:1-15**.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover feast was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip; *“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”* He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, *“Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”* Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. *“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”*

Jesus said, *“Have the people sit down.”* There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, *“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”* So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, *“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”* Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Notice in John:

- the Passover is mentioned by Jesus
- Philip, Andrew and a boy mentioned as characters
- Jesus tests Philip, knowing what he will do to feed the crowd.
- The crowd says he is a prophet and want to make him king.

And notice in Mark:

- Jesus is teaching
- the time is late, it is a lonely place (like the desert)
- the disciples want to send the crowd away,
- no disciples are named.

John's Gospel is described as a "**Book of Signs**" indicating that John interprets events in Jesus' ministry as signs to point people toward faith in Jesus. This is why John provides details that show this event is a faith-stretching learning experience for the disciples. After the feeding of the 5000 is the story of Jesus walking on water and then follows a long discourse in which Jesus explains that he is "**the Bread of Life.**" Physical bread is compared to "spiritual bread."

What does this story mean for you and me and our faith? What do I learn in this story about Jesus Christ? And what can I see in the example of a **lesser-known saint** who shares his lunch with Jesus and many, hungry people?

On the eve of Passover, the feast of the Unleavened Bread, Jesus provides **bread** to a hungry gathering not unlike Moses whom God used to give **manna** to the children of Israel in the wilderness. All of John's signs point to Jesus—so we will understand that the man from Nazareth is the new Moses, the Messiah, the Son of God in human flesh, the Word, and the Lamb of God. And so that we will believe in Him and experience the Life he brings to us.

Jesus **provides** bread.

Bread—reminiscent of manna

Give us this day our daily bread

Man does not live by bread alone

Jesus **is** the bread of life.

Living bread

Bread that comes down from heaven (*Bread of heaven; feed me till I want no more*)

Bread and wine; body and blood

He was *known* in the breaking of the bread

What about this **miracle**? This bread miracle? Is it possible that **no miracle** ever happened? Did everyone have his own lunch hidden in the folds of his robe? Some scholars have suggested that

this Feeding Story was a giant potluck picnic where everyone ate from his or her brown bag meal. A friend suggested to me the real miracle is the sharing that happened under the influence of Jesus' teaching. Interesting! Maybe.

Of course, some people approach all the Bible stories by looking for **natural** explanations of phenomenon before turning to miraculous (**supernatural**) explanations only as a last resort. I wonder if our distinction between the natural and the supernatural is shaded by our *modern* assumptions. Did not God create the natural order? Can his hand not be seen in ways little and big? Is a rainbow natural or supernatural? What about the migration of monarch butterflies and the swallows of San Juan Capistrano?

But here is the clinching evidence that Jesus did something out of the ordinary---all four gospel writers tell us that the disciples distributed food and that all were fed. John's gospel mentions leftovers and explicitly calls this event a "miraculous sign."

The details of the miracle are never described by John. The bottom line: they started with a little and had more left over than what they had at first (five loaves and two fish). Some commentators see the five loaves corresponding to the five books of the Law; and the two fish remind us of the two tablets of the Law. Similarly, the 12 baskets of leftovers link the 12 disciples to the 12 tribes of OT Jews. I don't think so. The **12 baskets-full** simply indicates the fact that each disciple gathered leftovers in his wicker basket and each one filled his basket.

Starting with a little – where did that little bit of food come from? Who provided it? **A little boy...** I wonder why he came forward? Did Philip know him? Was he Philip's nephew? Did Philip take it from him? Did the disciple forcibly persuade the lad to give up his lunch? Or was the youngster the only one willing to *share*? The latter explanation appeals to me. If more sharers were forthcoming then the Master would have had more food at the start.

Do you know the difference between **sharing** and **giving**?

Sharing: *sharing is giving and keeping (mia casa, sua casa)*

- Helen and car
- The woman in London with 'her cookies'
- my neighbor shares his ladder with me; my tiller with him

Giving: *giving expects no payment, no quid pro quo.*

- The little boy gave up his lunch to Philip.
- Hidden or anonymous gifts (notes, calls, \$\$, meals)
- Michael Phelps gives up spot in relay race--Olympics

We do expect something *though* when we give. Not a payment but what? We expect to see some good come from our giving. Maybe a smile on your youngster's face when he opens that birthday gift. Maybe we expect a thank you, a sign of appreciation. But true giving gives without knowing

or being able to guarantee such outcomes. **“God so loved the world He gave His only Son...”** Even God does not guarantee that everyone in the world will receive his Son or acknowledge him or accept his love.

Christian *giving* is an act of faith. I think the boy with the loaves and fish was willing to give up his lunch to feed others. I don't think he knew what was going to happen. But he may have known his little lunch was going to be presented to Jesus. Remember those words said to the owner of the donkey on Palm Sunday: **“The Lord has need of it.”** An anonymous child saw that the Lord had need of his lunch and he trusted him enough to give up his simple lunch of barley loaves and dried fish.

When you give to God your money or your possessions (along with your heart), you give up control over it. You believe he can and will use it for his glory and for meeting the needs of the world. And if you believe this feeding story, you know Jesus can take your offering and make something beautiful and bountiful of it.

Isn't that what you and I want? For God to take our gifts, our time, our jobs, our families, our relationships, our interests, our schoolwork, our hobbies, our little bit of money – and to make something bigger and better out of it for the good of the world and the glory of God.

In **Baptism** we witness parents making promises to God about caring for a child. Why do we do this? As an act of faith we hope and pray God will take our little ones and grow them and cause their lives to be fruitful and faithful ones.

In **Communion** we eat and drink a tiny portion of a meal (a bite of bread and a sip of juice) recalling Jesus' meal with his friends. And believing that Jesus' sacrificial death makes a difference for our lives. We ask God to take ordinary elements (in the sacraments) and to bless them for an extra-ordinary purpose—our spiritual growth and our well-being.

God is in the multiplication business. He takes what little we have to give and makes it more than enough. **If we really give it** (without strings attached) **and if we offer it in faith.** If we trust Him to provide for us. This story does present him as the Great Provider, doesn't it? The more you learn to give, the more you are learning to trust Him. And if you trust Him, you will let Him take your gifts out of your control where He can distribute them.

How much faith, hope, and compassion do you have? Five loaves and two fish worth? That's not much, is it? But look what God can do with a little! Share a little. Give a little. God will take care of the rest. He will multiply it!